Exploring Buddhist Perspectives on Bioethical Issues:

Abortion, Euthanasia, Cloning and Animal Experimentation in Research

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Introduction

We are in the era of scientific technology. The technological advancement and its practical application in medical sciences have made our lives much better as well as have given rise to a series of new ethical issues in the field of bioethics, a branch of applied ethics. Abortion, euthanasia, cloning, genetic engineering, etc., serious issues have been discussed among ethicists in the field of bioethics. The debates over these issues are still ongoing among ethicists but my aim is to discuss these bioethical issues from the perspective of Buddhism. These contemporary problems of our society will be analyzed by applying core ethical principles and ideas of Buddhist philosophy. My interest in these issues is due to their relevance to the society. These are the burning problems of our society and I think religion plays an important role in every aspect of social issues. According to the report of the Health Organization (WHO), around 73 million induced abortions take place in the world per year and 6 out of 10 of all unintended pregnancies end in an induced abortion and according to the report of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MHFW) of India, India recorded over 11 lakh spontaneous and induced abortions between March 2021-April 2022.

State of Art

A contentious issue in bioethics is abortion. It is the termination of pregnancy. It refers to the voluntary and active destruction of the fetus before 28 weeks generally and although it is legally recognized in the modern world, there is a massive debate regarding the moral support of abortion between conservatives and liberalists. The debate is based on whether a human fetus can be termed as a human or not. Conservatives believe that there is an unbroken sequence of life from embryo to human being. We cannot make any demarcation between fetus and human child that would define the one as 'fetus' and the other as 'human'. Therefore, conservatives believe in the equal rights of both fetuses and humans. the same sense and degree to which the term 'killing is applied to the human child is equally applicable to 'fetus.' So, abortion is not morally permissible. On the other hand, according to the liberal view, the embryo or fetus and human are not the same. They have no equal rights. An embryo is a part of a human. Its moral value is insignificant and therefore it cannot be comparable to any adult human. Therefore, abortion is morally permissible at any stage or level of reproduction. Furthermore, feminists

believe that a woman's decision is final regarding abortion because the fetus belongs to her own body. No one can take decision except the woman who conceives the fetus.

Now the main aim is to discuss this issue from the perspective of Buddhist Philosophy and religion. First of all, it is most important to remember that Buddha was mainly an ethical teacher and was very practical to life. His main aim was the liberation of human suffering and prevention of suffering and finding out the way through which the cessation of suffering is possible. That is why in Buddhism we cannot find any moral principle that is formulated for the sake of formal rules or for the fulfilment of theoretical needs. In the context of abortion, Buddhist ethics simply goes against it. The foundation of Buddhist ethics is the 'Pancasila' which is the ethical guideline for Buddhist practitioners. The five precepts guide ethical behaviour and are aimed at cultivating a peaceful and virtuous life. The first precept is - refraining from killing any life - this vow necessarily includes the killing of humans as well as other animals and even in the extreme sense of trees and insects. Therefore, any action done physically or verbally that harms oneself or others is called immoral action. In Buddhist philosophy, there is a deep respect for life, including the life of a fetus. They think that a fetus is a living person from the moment of conception, more specifically some teachings in Buddhism consider consciousness to be present at the time of conception. So, the fetus has life too and life cannot be terminated by anyone because it is an 'akusala karma' that arises from actions rooted in greed, hatred and violence which lead to suffering and negative outcomes for oneself to others. In Buddhist ethics, on the other hand, kusala karma is defined as an action that is rooted in kindness, compassion, wisdom, generosity, and other virtuous qualities and that leads to positive consequences and eventually liberation from suffering. Buddhist teachings always tell us to engage ourselves in the practice of kusala karma, not in the practice of akusala karma. Abortion which is akusala karma, is strictly prohibited in any circumstances because it is nothing but murder. Murder is morally wrongful if it is done intentionally or negligently. According to Buddhism, the prevention of pregnancy is more rational and acceptable than abortion. Moreover, Abortion or feticide is considered an obstacle that prevents to bear the fruit of an action that is pre-made and it is an obstacle in the way of transmigration of soul that is known as 'Punarjanma'. It is important to remember that Buddhists do not believe in any strict rules. Their religion is extremely tolerable and sympathetic. In any particular situation, abortion may be justified or can be termed as skillful act.

Apart from abortion, there are so many debates in bioethics such as euthanasia, human cloning. Animal rights and experimentation that can also be discussed from the perspectives of Buddhist

point of view. Euthanasia is a highly controversial and ethically complex issue that is based on the question of the autonomy of the patient and the sanctity of life. The deliberate ending of a person's life with a view to relieve him from unbearable physical suffering is known as euthanasia. Some people argue in support of euthanasia based on the autonomy of a person. They believe that individuals have the right to make autonomous decisions about their own lives, including the choice to end their suffering through euthanasia. The practice of euthanasia is legalized in many countries, for example, Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. However, the opponents of euthanasia often argue that the practice of euthanasia goes against our religious beliefs and is morally wrong because life cannot be terminated deliberately which is seen as interfering with the natural order or as contrary to divine will. Buddhism, with its emphasis on compassion, mindfulness, and the alleviation of suffering, offers a unique lens through which we can examine euthanasia. The concept of karma and the cycle of rebirth, the nature of suffering, the principle of non-harming and Buddhist respect for life play important roles in figuring out their insight into this matter. Buddhist believes that life is full of suffering and no one can deny it. They recognize the universality of suffering in the first noble truth. The principle of karma governs the whole of our life. It underscores the importance of intention in all actions. Karma refers to the law of cause and effect, wherein intentional actions have consequences that shape future experiences. Thus, the motivation behind euthanasia is crucial. If the intention is to alleviate suffering out of compassion, without attachment or aversion, it may be seen as a skillful means. However, if euthanasia is motivated by fear, despair, or a desire to escape suffering without considering its broader implications, it may lead to negative karmic consequences. From a Buddhist perspective, euthanasia may be justified when it arises from a place of genuine compassion and is guided by wisdom.

The Buddhist teachings and principles can also be applied to cloning and animal experimentation in evaluating their perspectives on these issues. Cloning, the most contentious issue in bioethics, is the process of creating a genetically identical copy of an organism. In biology, cloning can occur naturally, such as in the case of identical twins, where a single fertilized egg splits into two embryos. However, the term "cloning" is most commonly associated with artificial or scientific methods used to replicate organisms. Cloning is of two kinds- reproductive cloning and therapeutic cloning. Reproductive cloning has been achieved through a technique called somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT). In cloning technology, the nucleus of an adult human somatic cell is inserted into a human egg that has had its nucleus removed. The egg cell, now containing the donor nucleus, is stimulated to develop into an

embryo, which can then be implanted into a surrogate mother. Cloning and animal experimentation may be discussed on the basis of non-harming principles, reverence for life and compassion. So, we can say Buddhism doesn't explicitly address cloning but its principles provide a framework for ethical reflection and decision-making regarding technological advancements like cloning, animal experimentation, etc.

Problem to be investigated

Investigating the Buddhist perspectives on bioethical issues is a rich field of inquiry. there is a growing need to understand how Buddhist principles and teachings can inform ethical decision-making in the realm of biomedicine. How does Buddhist ethics guide us to make ethical decision in biomedical contexts- this problem is to be investigated.

Objectives of the investigation and motivation

Buddhism is not only a religion but also a philosophy or a way of life. It provides not only theoretical teachings but it has also practical implication in our society. There are a lot of issues in our society such as abortion, euthanasia, etc. We can consider these bioethical issues from the perspectives of Buddhist philosophy to change our social attitudes toward these issues. The motivation behind this topic- figuring out bioethics within the framework of Buddhist philosophy is unique.

Research questions

Here are some research questions specifically focusing on the Buddhist perspective on bioethical issues:

1. What are the core philosophical principles within Buddhism that inform its approach to bioethical issues or what insights does Buddhism offer on bioethical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, cloning, animal rights and experimentation?
2. Is there any ethical principle of Buddhist philosophy that can be applied to determine whether abortion is morally right or wrong?
3. Does Buddhist ethics support non-therapeutic induced abortion?
4. Is non-therapeutic induced abortion kusala action or akusala action?
5. How euthanasia is treated in Buddhism by applying its core ethical principles?
6. What insights can Buddhist teachings offer into the ethical considerations surrounding genetic replication and manipulation?

7. How does Buddhism interpret the principle of non-harming (ahimsa) in the context of animal rights and experimentation?

Research design and methodology

The methodology that will be adopted in the present study is as follows:

1. A critical analysis of abortion from Buddhist perspectives.
2. Conceptual analysis will be taken for the study and development of new insight into this matter.

Sources of data and tools to be used in collection of data

The data is essential for any kind of research to a researcher. So, for collecting the data I have to depend on primary and secondary sources. Specifically, to collect data on Buddhist perspectives on bioethical issues, I could use the method of textual analysis.

Analysis of data

Analysing the data plays the most significant role in doing research. Before analysing it, we have to first collect the data from various sources, mainly primary and secondary sources. The data analysis requires a number of closely related operations such as the establishment of categories, tabulation and then drawing inferences. The research on bioethical issues requires data from various sources and examines the data in the light of Buddhist philosophy.

Its relevance to the present-day problem and need to the society

Bioethical problems are present-day problems of our society. Abortion, euthanasia, etc. are burning problems and these issues are debatable among ethicists. Buddhist perspectives on these issues offer a unique insight that helps for the betterment of society

Contribution to the existing knowledge

Generally, we discuss bioethical issues from the context of applied ethics. So many books and articles are written on bioethical issues from the perspective of applied ethics but from the Buddhist perspective, these issues have been discussed very less. So my contribution to bioethical issues from Buddhist philosophy may add more knowledge to this area.

Future work

Future work on exploring the Buddhist perspective on bioethical issues holds significant promise for enriching our understanding of ethical decision-making in the context of rapidly advancing biomedical technologies. By identifying gaps in existing knowledge and proposing new avenues for research, scholars are engaged in the development of Buddhist perspectives on bioethical issues.

Tentative chapter division

In discussing the topic, I suggest the following chapters tentatively:

Introduction

Chapter I- Bioethics: An Overview

Chapter II- Buddhists' Perspective on Abortion

Chapter III- Buddhists' Perspective on Euthanasia

Chapter IV- Buddhists' Perspective on Cloning

Chapter V- Buddhists' Perspective on Animal Rights and Experimentation

Conclusion

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